COMPUTERS / HILLEL SEGAL

This is one 101 you don't need

As a Word Perfect user, you may have been intrigued by advertisements for a new program called 101 Macros For Word Perfect, or 101 for short.

But what does this program from Macropac International of Cupertino, Calif., do? Would it be helpful to use every day? And is it worth the $69.95 plus $4 shipping cost?

Before I answer these questions, let me explain what a macro is. It is simply a prerecorded string of characters or commands that can be called up by hitting a key combination. You might define a key combination of Alt-p, done by holding down the Alt key and pressing p, to print the current page of a document, save it and exit Word Perfect.

If this was an action that you performed many times each day, you'd save all of the following keystrokes: Shift-F7, the Word Perfect command to print; 2 , the menu selection to print the page; F7, the Word Perfect command to Exit; Y, to answer yes to the question "Do you wish to save the file?"; carriage return, to accept the current file name; Y, to answer the question "Replace previous file?"; Y, to answer the question "Exit WP?"

As you can see, the use of a simple macro for all these actions could be a real time-saver. Up until several years ago, you needed to buy a memory-resident program such as SuperKey or ProKey to achieve this. Now, popular programs such as WordPerfect include the ability to set up macros at will.

When you're in Word Perfect, just press the Macro Def key, designate the key combination you want to use to call up a macro in the future, enter the string of characters or commands, and then press the Macro Def key again. That's all there is to it.

With this in mind, what does 101 do? From the way it's advertised, you'd guess that it provides you with 101 prerecorded macros for all types of multiple-purpose functions. But it doesn't.

101's real purpose is to provide macros that replace Word Perfect's own key combinations for each function. For example, to save a file in Word Perfect, just press the F10 function key for Save, carriage return to accept the current file name, and Y to answer the question "Replace current file?" Using 101's macro to do the same thing, you press Alt-z to invoke 101 followed by sf, which stands for save file. The effort is almost the same.

Almost all of 101's macros are similar to the save file macro in complexity. Indeed, you have to memorize a different set of commands to do the same thing that

Word Perfect can do. For most Word Perfect users, it adds complication rather than simplicity, because the existing Word Perfect commands are pretty simple.

It is actually better to set up your own macros rather than use someone else's, because self-built macros better fit your needs and are actually easier to remember.

The bottom line: In essence, the author of 101 made a new word processing program out of Word Perfect, one that may be marginally easier to use than the existing program, but one that requires you to memorize new commands nonetheless. I did not find myself using it every day after it was installed, and would not recommend 101 Macros For Word Perfect for this reason, regardless of cost.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant and author of the monthly Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.

Segal